



Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry
TALKING POINTS
ATSDR's Position on Removing Zonolite in Libby Homes and Businesses

HHS APPROVED 3-22-02

Please note: these talking points may be used to respond to media and other public inquiries and to develop fact sheets, and other communications materials.

ISSUE

EPA Expected to Declare a Public Health Emergency in Libby

In March 2002, EPA Region 8 is expected to release a new *Action Memorandum Amendment*, although EPA Headquarters has not yet finalized or approved the document. These *Talking Points* should be used if EPA approves the *Action Memorandum Amendment*.

The *Action Memorandum Amendment* is an amendment to the initial *Removal Action* (May 23, 2000) and the *Action Memorandum Amendment* (August 13, 2001), which are summarized in the background section at the end of this document.

The *Action Memorandum Amendment* provides for the removal of Zonolite attic insulation in homes, businesses, and public buildings in Libby and the Libby Valley. The proposed costs include a ceiling increase of \$34,659,000 with a total project ceiling of \$55,025,000.

By taking this action EPA has determined that people in Libby have been exposed to amphibole asbestos through multiple pathways, and that cumulative exposure may be contributing to asbestos-related health effects. **EPA believes that the conditions in Libby present an imminent and substantial threat to human health and the environment.**

EPA's Decision Could Have an Impact Across the Nation

EPA's decision to remove Zonolite attic insulation from private homes and businesses in Libby is specific to that community because of the large number of pathways of exposure that have occurred. However, this action may have a major impact beyond Libby, sending an unintended message to the public that Zonolite attic insulation should be removed everywhere, not just in Libby.

Millions of home, offices, and schools across the country have Zonolite attic insulation (although the numbers are unclear, it is estimated as many as 35 million buildings are affected). People across the country may feel that the Zonolite attic insulation in their homes should be removed and that the government should pay for the cost, which could exceed \$10 billion.

ATSDR TALKING POINTS

Key ATSDR Communication Messages

1. ATSDR has reviewed EPA's proposal to remove Zonolite attic insulation from homes in Libby and the Libby Valley. ATSDR agrees that EPA should take whatever measures are necessary to reduce exposure to asbestos from contaminated Zonolite to be protective of public health in Libby and the Libby Valley.
2. The removal action in Libby is warranted because the cumulative effects of all the different sources of asbestos exposure are dangerous to people's health and the environment.
3. ATSDR believes that the Zonolite attic insulation will not threaten health if left undisturbed.
4. Zonolite attic insulation is a problem in Libby because residents have been exposed to asbestos through many other sources. By eliminating Zonolite attic insulation from homes and businesses in Libby and the Libby Valley, the one possible route of further exposure to asbestos will be eliminated.
5. Many people in the Libby area have already been exposed to asbestos from multiple routes. Eighteen percent of residents x-rayed during ATSDR's health testing had lung abnormalities.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. What is ATSDR's role here?

ATSDR has reviewed EPA's proposal to remove Zonolite attic insulation from homes in Libby and the Libby Valley. ATSDR agrees that EPA should take whatever measures are necessary to reduce exposure to asbestos from contaminated Zonolite to be protective of public health in Libby and the Libby Valley.

2. Is ATSDR also declaring a public health emergency?

No, ATSDR does not need to make this declaration to continue its work in the Libby community.

3. Who will pay to remove the insulation in Libby?

EPA will pay for the cleanup in Libby.

4. Who is doing the cleanup? contractors? the government?

Because EPA is conducting the cleanup in Libby, they would answer that question and other removal questions. Please contact the EPA office in Libby at 406-293-6194.

5. Dust settles in mattresses, sofas, rugs, and carpeting. Does that mean all these items are also contaminated? What are you going to do about that? What is ATSDR's position on the dust that may remain?

EPA has conducted dust and air samples inside homes and has concluded that the threat to residents from exposure to asbestos justifies removing the vermiculite insulation from homes in

Libby and the Libby Valley. This question should be referred to EPA for response because it is developing the cleanup protocols.

6. I have attic insulation. How can I check if it is Zonolite attic insulation? What does it look like? Do you have a picture? Is there a brand name?

Answers to these questions can be obtained by contacting the EPA Information Center in Libby, Montana at 406-293-6194.

7. Was the material used elsewhere besides attics, for example as wall insulation? Again, how can I check?

Answers to these questions can be obtained by contacting the EPA Information Center in Libby, Montana at 406-293-6194.

8. Millions of homes across the country have Zonolite insulation in their attics. Does ATSDR think this insulation should be removed from all those homes too? If no, why not? What's the difference?

The Zonolite attic insulation will not threaten health if left undisturbed. There are instances when you should remove the material. For example, if you remodel your attic or go there often, then you should have the material removed by an abatement company. Do NOT remove the material yourself.

The situation in Libby, however, is much different than in the rest of the country. Many people in Libby have already been exposed to asbestos from other sources. The multiple pathways AND the cumulative exposures, which are unique to Libby, are what prompted EPA's decision to remove the insulation from attics in Libby and the Libby Valley.

9. Who will pay for our healthcare?

The cost and availability of healthcare continues to be a major issue for Libby residents. ATSDR continues to work with federal, state, and local partners to address these concerns. Some people who have been exposed to asbestos may not have adequate access to healthcare. HHS has already taken a number of steps (see the *Current and Future HHS Activities in Libby* section at the end of this document) and will continue to explore options on how federal health programs can support the healthcare needs of the Libby community.

10. We've heard about tremolite asbestos but not about amphibole asbestos until now. Can you explain the difference? Which one is more toxic?

Tremolite is a form of amphibole asbestos. Amphibole asbestos is a group of fibrous minerals with similar characteristics. These fibers consist of two chains of silicate molecules that form long, thin fibers. The amphibole asbestos minerals include tremolite asbestos, actinolite asbestos, anthophyllite asbestos, amosite asbestos, and crocidolite asbestos. Tremolite asbestos is considered as toxic as other forms of amphibole asbestos.

BACKGROUND

EPA Activities in Libby

The initial *Removal Action*, which was authorized on May 23, 2000, addressed the threats posed by the high levels of amphibole asbestos contamination associated with vermiculite ores and/or mining wastes at two industrial Libby locations.

The *Action Memorandum Amendment*, which was approved by U.S. EPA on August 13, 2001, increased the site funding, approved ongoing activities, and addressed contamination at other locations in Libby and the Libby Valley.

In March 2002, EPA Region 8 will release a new *Action Memorandum Amendment* to (1) request a funding increase for the Libby asbestos site and (2) modify and expand the scope of the initial removal action.

Number of Homes in Libby With Zonolite Insulation

According to EPA estimates, 60 to 70% of the roughly 600 homes within the city limits contain Zonolite attic insulation. EPA also estimates that 20 to 30% of the roughly 2,000 residences in the Libby Valley have Zonolite attic insulation. In addition, Zonolite attic insulation was found in several business buildings.

EPA collected 261 dust samples from 111 residences or buildings and found that 25% of these properties had amphibole asbestos fibers greater than 5 micrometer (μm) in length, at levels of up to or greater than 25,000 fibers per square centimeter (f/cm^2).

In addition, over 70% of the samples of Zonolite attic insulation collected in Libby homes had detectable levels of amphibole asbestos, with over 7% of the samples showing concentrations above 1%.

How ATSDR Became Involved at Libby

In the fall of 1999, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) received and acted on requests for assistance from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Senator Baucus regarding human health concerns related to possible exposure to asbestos in the Libby area.

HHS asked ATSDR to evaluate human health concerns in Libby that were related to asbestos exposure. As part of the public health action plan, ATSDR, in collaboration with EPA and state and local officials, developed several public health actions for Libby, such as a medical testing program to identify and examine people whose health may have been affected from asbestos in and near Libby.

Current and Future ATSDR Activities in Libby

ATSDR will continue to assess the impact of asbestos-related conditions in the Libby, in conjunction with EPA, other HHS agencies, the State of Montana, and members of the community.

ATSDR is currently consulting with a team of experts from around the world regarding the development of a registry that will follow the health of those from the Libby area exposed to asbestos. Through following people in the registry, scientists and physicians may learn more about what health effects to anticipate, and hopefully find ways to treat those afflicted more effectively.

ATSDR is currently analyzing the second round of testing of the Libby health screening that was conducted in the summer of 2001. ATSDR will report back to the community when the results are out.

In summer 2001, ATSDR conducted CT-scans for people who were part of the first round of testing. The CT-scans were conducted to compare effectiveness of CT-scans with x-rays in identifying asbestos-related lung abnormalities.

Current and Future HHS Activities in Libby

Other HHS agencies also made a major commitment to the Libby community and continue to provide support.

The Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA) awarded funds for a community health center (CHC) in Libby. The CHC will provide primary care services for all of Lincoln County. Its focus is on providing selected primary care services to those in the community who are medically underserved. According to HRSA officials the CHC should receive at least \$400,000 per year and can continue in perpetuity. The CHC is governed by a community board that decides on services and treatments to be provided through the clinic. As funding is limited, the board will have to make hard decisions to fairly distribute services to both those with asbestos-related diseases and those with other illnesses.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) will provide \$80,000 as a contract to the hospital for psychological and social services, education, and outreach for those affected by asbestos-related problems. The initial contract is for one year and started in August, 2001. Designation as a "Health Professional Shortage Area" (HPSA) makes the community eligible to compete for HRSA programs that place health professionals in high-need areas through loan repayment incentives.